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LILLIAN:

A FAIRY TALE.

BY

WINTHROP MACKWORTH PRAED.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE reader is requested to believe that the following statement is literally true ; because the writer is well aware that the circumstances under which LILLIAN was composed are the only source of its merits, and the only apology for its faults.

At a small party at Cambridge some malicious Belles X
endeavoured to confound their sonnetteering friends, by setting unintelligible and inexplicable subjects for the exercise of their poetical talents. Among many others the Thesis was given out which is the motto of LILLIAN—

“ A Dragon’s tail is flayed to warm
A Headless Maiden’s heart,”

and the following Poem was an attempt to explain the riddle.

The partiality with which it has been honoured in manuscript, and the frequent applications which have been made to the author for copies, must be his excuse for sending it to the press.

It was written, however, with the sole view of amusing the friends in whose circle the idea originated ; and to them, with all due humility and devotion, it is inscribed.

Trinity College, Cambridge,
October 26, 1822.

Elizabeth & Frances Sutcliffe - now
Hawker, & Mr. Dodson

LILLIAN.

“ A Dragon’s tail is flayed to warm
A headless Maiden’s heart.”

MISS —

“ And he’s cleckit this great muckle bird out o’ this wee egg! he
could wile the very flounders out o’ the Frith.”

MR. SADDLETREE.

CANTO I.

THERE was a Dragon in Arthur’s time,
When Dragons and Griffins were voted “ prime,”
Of monstrous reputation :
Up and down, and far and wide,
He roamed about in his scaly pride ;
And ever, at morn and even-tide,
He made such rivers of blood to run
As shocked the sight of the blushing sun,
And deluged half the nation.

It was a pretty Monster too,
With a crimson head, and a body blue,
And wings of a warm and delicate hue,
Like the glow of a deep carnation :
And the terrible Tail that lay behind,
Reached out so far as it twisted and twined,
That a couple of Dwarfs, of wondrous strength,
Bore, when he travelled, its horrible length,
Like a Duke's at the Coronation.
His mouth had lost one ivory tooth,
Or the Dragon had been, in very sooth,
No insignificant charmer ;
And that, —— alas ! he had ruined it,
When on New-Year's-day, in a hungry fit,
He swallowed a tough and a terrible bit,—
Sir Lob in his brazen armour.
Swift and light were his steps on the ground,
Strong and smooth was his hide around,
For the weapons which the peasants flung
Ever unfelt or unheeded rung,
Arrow, and stone, and spear,
As snow o'er Cynthia's window flits,

Or raillery of twenty wits
On a Fool's unshrinking ear.

In many a battle the Beast had been,
Many a blow he had felt and given.
Sir Digorè came with a menacing mien,
But he sent Sir Digorè straight to Heaven;
Stiff and stour were the arms he wore,
Huge the sword he was wont to clasp,
But the sword was little, the armour brittle,
Locked in the coil of the Dragon's grasp.

He came on Sir Florice of Sesseny Land,
Pretty Sir Florice from over the sea,
And smashed him all as he stepped on the sand,
Cracking his head like a nut from the tree.
No one till now, had found, I trow,
Any thing good in the scented youth,
Who had taken much pains to be rid of his brains,
Before they were sought by the Dragon's tooth.

He came on the Sheriff of Hereford,
As he sat him down to his Sunday dinner;

And the Sheriff he spoke but this brief word,
 “ St. Francis be good to a corpulent sinner ! ”
Fat was he, as a Sheriff might be,
 From the crown of his head to the tip of his toe ;
But the Sheriff was small, or nothing at all,
 When put in the jaws of the Dragon foe.

He came on the Abbot of Arnondale,
 As he kneeled him down to his morning devotion ;
But the Dragon he shuddered, and turned his tail
 About, “ with a short uneasy motion.”
Iron and steel, for an early meal,
 He stomached with ease, or the Muse is a liar ;
But out of all question, he failed in digestion,
 If ever he ventured to swallow a Friar !

Monstrous Brute !—his dread renown
Made whispers and terrors in country and town ;
Nothing was babbled by Boor or Knight
But tales of his Civic appetite.
At last, as after dinner he lay,
Hid from the heat of the solar ray

By boughs that had woven an arbour shady,
He chanced to fall in with the Headless Lady.
Headless!—alas! 'twas a piteous gibe;
I'll drink Aganippe, and then describe.

Her father had been a stout yeomàn,
Fond of his jest, and fond of his can,
 But never over-wise;
And once, when his cups had been many and deep,
He met with a Dragon fast asleep,
 'Twas a Faery in disguise.
In a Dragon's form she had ridden the storm,
 The realm of the sky invading;
Sir Grahame's ship was stout and fast,
But the Faery came on the rushing blast,
And shivered the sails, and shivered the mast,
And down went the gallant ship, at last,
 With all the crew and lading.
And the Fay laughed out, to see the rout,
 As the last dim hope was fading;
And this she had done, in a love of fun,
 And a love of masquerading.

She lay that night in a sunny vale,

And the yeoman found her sleeping ;

Fiercely he smote her glittering tail,

But oh ! his courage began to fail,

When the Faery rose all weeping.

“Thou hast lopped,” she said—“beshrew thine hand !

The fairest foot in Faery-Land !

“Thou hast an Infant in thine home !—

Never to her shall Reason come

For weeping or for wail,

Till she shall ride with a fearless face

On a living Dragon’s scale,

And fondly clasp to her heart’s embrace

A living Dragon’s tail.”

The Faery’s form from his shuddering sight

Flowed away in a stream of light.

Disconsolate that youth departed,

Disconsolate, and poor ;

And wended, chill and broken-hearted,

To his cottage on the moor ;

Sadly and silently he knelt
His lonely hearth beside ;
Alas !—how desolate he felt
As he hid his face, and cried.
The cradle where the Babe was laid
Stood in its own dear nook,
But long—how long !—he knelt, and prayed,
And did not dare to look.
He looked at last ;—his joy was there,
And slumbering with that placid air
Which only Babes and Angels wear.
Over the cradle he leaned his head ;
The cheek was warm, and the lip was red ;
And he felt, he felt, as he saw her lie,
A hope,—which was a mockery.
The Babe unclosed her eye's pale lid ;—
Why doth he start from the sight it hid ?
He hath seen in the dim and fitful ray,
That the light of the soul hath gone away !
Sigh nor prayer he uttered there,
In mute and motionless despair,

But he laid him down beside his child,
And LILLIAN saw him die,—and smiled.
The Mother!—she had gone before;
And in the cottage on the moor,
With none to watch her and caress,
No arm to clasp, no voice to bless,
The witless Child grew up alone,
And made all Nature's Book her own.

If, in the warm and passionate hour
When Reason sleeps in Fancy's bower,
If thou hast ever, ever felt
A dream of delicate beauty melt
 Into thine heart's recess,
Seen by the soul, and seen by the mind,
 But indistinct in its loveliness,
Adored, and not defined;
A bright creation, a shadowy ray,
Fading and flitting in mist away,
Nothing to gaze on, and nothing to hear,
But something to cheat the eye and ear

With a fond conception and joy of both,
So that you might, that hour, be loth
To change for Some one's sweetest kiss
Thy vision of unenduring bliss,
Or lose for Some one's sweetest tone
The murmur thou drinkest all alone,—
If such a Vision hath ever been thine,
Thou hast a heart that may look on mine !

For Oh ! the light of my saddened theme
Was like to nought but a Poet's dream,
Or the forms that come on the Twilight's wing,
Shaped by the Soul's imagining.
Beautiful shade, with her tranquil air,
And her thin white arm, and her flowing hair,
And the light of her eye so coldly obscure,
And the hue of her cheek so pale and pure !
Reason and Thought she had never known,
Her heart was as cold as a heart of stone ;
So you might guess from her eyes' dim rays,
And her idiot laugh, and her vacant gaze.

She wandered about all lone on the heather,
She and the wild heath-birds together ;
For LILLIAN seldom spoke or smiled,
But she sang as sweet as a little child.
Into her song her dreams would throng,
Silly, and wild, and out of place ;
And yet that wild and roving song
Entranced the soul in its desolate grace.
And hence the story had ever run
That the fairest of Dames was a Headless One.

The Pilgrim in his foreign weeds
Would falter in his prayer ;
And the Monk would pause with his half-told beads
To breathe a blessing there ;
The Knight would loose his vizor-clasp,
And drop the rein from his nerveless grasp,
And pass his hand across his brow
With a sudden sigh, and a whispered vow,
And marvel Flattery's tale was told,
From a lip so young, to an ear so cold.

She had seen her sixteenth winter out
When she met with the Beast I was singing about :
The Dragon, I told you, had dined that day ;
So he gazed upon her as he lay
Earnestly looking, and looking long,
With his appetite weak, and his wonder strong.
Silent he lay in his motionless coil ;
And the song of the Lady was sweet the while,—

“ Nonny Nonny !—I hear it float,
Innocent bird, thy tremulous note ;
It comes from thy home in the eglantine,
And I stay this idle song of mine,
Nonny Nonny !—to listen to thine !

“ Nonny Nonny !—‘ LILLIAN sings
The sweetest of all living things !’
So Sir Launcelot averred ;
But surely Sir Launcelot never heard
Nonny Nonny !—the natural bird !”

The Dragon he lay in mute amaze,
Till something of kindness crept into his gaze ;

He drew the flames of his nostrils in,
He veiled his claws with their speckled skin,
He curled his fangs in a hideous smile;
And the song of the Lady was sweet the while,—

“ Nonny Nonny!—who shall tell
Where the Summer breezes dwell?
Lightly and brightly they breathe and blow,
But whence they come and whither they go,
“ Nonny Nonny!—who shall know?

“ Nonny Nonny!—I hear your tone,
But I feel ye cannot read mine own;
And I lift my neck to your fond embraces,
But who hath seen in your resting places
Nonny Nonny!—your beautiful faces?”

A moment!—and the Dragon came
Crouching down to the peerless Dame,
With his fierce red eye so fondly shining,
And his terrible tail so meekly twining,
And the scales on his huge limbs gleaming o'er,
Gayer than ever they gleamed before.

She had won his heart, while she charmed his ear,
And LILLIAN smiled, and knew no fear.
And see, she mounts between his wings ;
 (Never a Queen had a gaudier throne),
And Faery-like she sits and sings,
 Guiding the steed with a touch and a tone.
Aloft, aloft in the clear blue Ether,
The Dame and the Dragon they soared together ;
He bore her away on the breath of the gale—
The two little Dwarfs held fast by the tail.

Fanny!—a pretty group for drawing ;
My Dragon like a war-horse pawing,
My Dwarfs in a fright, and my Girl in an attitude,
Patting the Beast in her soulless gratitude.
There ;—you may try it if you will,
While I drink my coffee, and nib my quill.

CANTO II.

THE sun shone out on hill and grove ;
It was a glorious day
The Lords and the Ladies were making love,
And the Clowns were making hay ;
But the Town of Brentford marked with wonder
A lightning in the sky, and thunder,
And thinking, ('twas a thinking town)
Some prodigy was coming down,
A mighty mob to Merlin went
To learn the cause of this portent ;
And he, a Wizard sage but comical,
Looked through his glasses astronomical,
And puzzled every foolish sponce
By this oracular response :—

“ Now the Slayer doth not slay,
Weakness flings her fear away,

Power bears the Powerless,
 Pity rides the Pityless;
 Are ye Lovers? are ye brave?
 Hear ye this, and seek, and save!
 He that would wed the loveliest maid,
 Must don the stoutest mail,
 For the Rider shall never be sound in the head,
 Till the Ridden be maimed in the tail.
 Hey, diddle diddle! the cat and the fiddle!
 None but a Lover can read me my riddle."

How kind art thou, and oh! how mighty,
 Cupid! thou Son of Aphrodite!
 By thy sole aid, in old Romance,
 Heroes and Heroines sing and dance;
 Of cane and rod there's little need;
 They never learn to write or read;
 Yet often, by thy sudden light,
 Enamoured Dames contrive to write;
 And often, in the hour of need,
 Enamoured Youths contrive to read.
 (I make a small digression here:
 I merely mean to make it clear

That if Sir Eglamour had wit
To read and construe, bit by bit,
All that the Wizard had expressed,
And start conjectures on the rest,
Cupid had sharpened his discerning,
The little God of Love,—and Learning),
He revolved in his bed, what Merlin had said,
Though Merlin had laboured to scatter a veil on't;
And found out the sense of the tail and the head,
Though none of his neighbours could make head or
tail on't.

Sir Eglamour was one o' the best
Of Arthur's Table Round;
He never set his spear in rest,
But a dozen went to the ground.
Clear and warm as the lightning flame,
His valour from his father came,
His cheek was like his mother's;
And his hazel eye more clearly shone
Than any I ever have looked upon,
Save Fanny's,—and two others!

With his spur so bright, and his rein so light,
And his steed so swift and ready,
And his skilful sword, to wound or ward,
And his spear so sure and steady ;
He bore him like a British Knight
From London to Penzance,
Avenged all weeping women's slight,
And made all giants dance.
And he had travelled far from home,
Had worn a masque at Venice,
Had kissed the Bishop's toe at Rome,
And beat the French at tennis :
Hence he had many a courtly play,
And jeerings and gibes in plenty,
And he wrote more rhymes in a single day
Than Byron or Bowles in twenty.

He clasped to his side his sword of pride,
His sword, whose native polish vied
With many a gory stain ;
Keen and bright as a meteor-light,
But not so keen, and not so bright,
As Moultrie's jesting vein.

And his shield he bound his arm around,
His shield, whose dark and dingy round
 Nought human could get through;
Heavy and thick as a wall of brick,
But not so heavy and not so thick
 As Roberts's Review.
With a smile and a jest he set out on the quest,
 Clad in his stoutest mail,
With his helm of the best, and his spear in the rest,
 To flay the Dragon's Tail.

The warrior travelled wearily,
 Many a league and many a mile;
And the Dragon sailed in the clear blue sky;
 And the song of the Lady was sweet the while,—
“ My steed and I, my steed and I,
On in the path of the winds we fly,
And I chase the planets that wander at Even,
And bathe my hair in the dews of Heaven!
Beautiful stars, so thin and bright,
Exquisite visions of vapour and light,
I love ye all with a sister's love,
And I rove with ye wherever ye rove,

And I drink your changeless, endless song,
The music ye make as ye wander along !
Oh ! let me be, as one of ye,
Floating for aye on your liquid sea ;
And I'll feast with you on the purest rain,
To cool my weak and wildered brain,
And I'll give you the loveliest lock of my hair
For a little spot in your realm of air !”

The Dragon came down when the morn shone bright,
And slept in the beam of the sun ;
Fatigued, no doubt, with his airy flight,
As I with my jingling one.
With such a monstrous adversary
Sir Eglamour was far too wary
To think of bandying knocks ;
He came on his foe as still as death,
Walking on tiptoe, and holding his breath,
And instead of drawing his sword from his sheath,
He drew a pepper-box !
The pepper was as hot as flame,
The box of wondrous size ;

He gazed one moment on the Dame,
Then, with a sure and a steady aim,
Full in the Dragon's truculent phiz
He flung the scorching powder—whiz!
And darkened both his eyes!

Have you not seen a little kite
Rushing away on its paper wing,
To mix with the wild winds' quarrelling?
Up it soars with an arrowy flight,
Till, weak and unsteady,
Torn by the eddy,
It dashes to earth from its hideous height.
Such was the rise of the Beast in his pain,
Such was his falling to earth again;
Upward he shot, but he saw not his path,
Blinded with pepper, and blinded with wrath;
One struggle,—one vain one,—of pain and emotion!
And he shot back again, 'like a bird of the ocean!'
Long he lay, in a trance, that day,
And alas! he did not wake before
The cruel Knight, with skill and might,
Had lopped and flayed the tail he wore.

Twelve hours by the chime he lay in his slime,
More utterly blind, I trow,
Than a Polypheme in the olden time,
Or a Politician now.
He sped, as soon as he could see,
To the Paynim bowers of Rosalie;
For there the Dragon had hope to cure,
By the tinkling rivulets ever pure,
By the glowing sun, and fragrant gale,
His wounded honour,—and wounded Tail!
He hied him away to the perfumed spot;
The little Dwarfs clung——where the Tail was not!

The Damsel gazed on that young Knight,
With something of terror, but more of delight;
Much she admired the gauntlets he wore,
Much the device that his buckler bore,
Much the feathers that danced on his crest,
But most the baldric that shone on his breast.
She thought the Dragon's pilfered scale
Was fairer far than the Warrior's mail,
And she lifted it up with her weak white arm,
Unconscious of its hidden charm,

And round her throbbing bosom tied,
In mimicry of warlike pride.

Gone is the Spell that bound her !
The Talisman hath touched her heart,
And she leaps with a fearful and fawn-like start
As the shades of glamoury depart,—
Strange thoughts are glimmering round her ;
Deeper and deeper her cheek is glowing,
Quicker and quicker her breath is flowing,
And her eye gleams out from its long dark lashes,
Fast and full, unnatural flashes ;
For hurriedly and wild
Doth Reason pour her hidden treasures,
Of human griefs, and human pleasures,
Upon her new-found Child.
And “ Oh ! ” she saith, “ my Spirit doth seem
To have risen to-day from a pleasant dream ;
A long, long dream,—but I feel it breaking !
Painfully sweet is the throb of waking ; ”
And then she laughed, and wept again :
While, gazing on her heart’s first rain,
Bound in his turn by a magic chain,
The silent Youth stood there :

Never had either been so blest ;—
You that are young may picture the rest,
 You that are young and fair.
Never before, on this warm land,
Came Love and Reason hand in hand.

When you were blest, in childhood's years,
With the brightest hopes, and the lightest fears,
Have you not wandered, in your dream,
 Where a greener glow was on the ground,
 And a clearer breath in the air around,
And a purer life in the gay sunbeam,
And a tremulous murmur in every tree,
And a motionless sleep on the quiet sea?
And have you not lingered, lingered still,
All unfettered in thought and will,
 A fair and cherished boy ;
Until you felt it pain to part
From the wild creations of your art,
Until your young and innocent heart
 Seemed bursting with its joy ?
And then, Oh then, hath your waking eye
Opened in all its ecstasy,

And seen your mother leaning o'er you,
The loved and loving one that bore you,
Giving her own, her fond caress,
And looking her eloquent tenderness?—
Was it not Heaven to fly from the scene
Where the heart in the vision of night had been,
And drink, in one o'erflowing kiss,
Your deep reality of bliss?
Such was LILLIAN's passionate madness,
Such the calm of her waking gladness.

Enough! my Tale is all too long :
Fair Children, if the trifling Song,
That flows for you to-night,
Hath stolen from you one gay laugh,
Or given your quiet hearts to quaff
One cup of young delight,
Pay ye the Rhymer for his toils
In the coinage of your golden smiles,
And treasure up his idle verse
With the stories ye loved from the lips of your nurse.

THE END.

